

## BOOK REVIEW

*Authority and Expertise in Ancient Scientific Culture*. Edited by JASON KONIG and GREG WOOLF. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 473. Hardcover, \$135.00. ISBN 978-1-107-06006-7.

As Jason König writes in his introduction, this volume aims to present a “capacious view of the interconnection between different bodies of ancient knowledge” and different ideas of what “expertise” entails (4). The volume’s essays indeed embrace a wide range of disciplines including philosophy, law, divination, medicine, and mathematics, from a multitude of textual genres (plus occasional references to material culture), over a period stretching from the “pre-Socratics” to late antiquity, spanning the Greek and Roman world. A final chapter by Geoffrey Lloyd extends the range still further, taking a broadly comparative approach to explore rival claims to authority among Mesopotamian astronomers, Indian philosophers, and Chinese mathematicians. All this is to say that König’s mission of inclusivity can be safely marked “accomplished.” While such a wide-ranging set of essays can hardly be done justice in this brief review, the volume is remarkable for the themes that span multiple contributions, and here I will follow up some of these threads.

The majority of the essays focus on periods when Greeks and Romans were in close cultural contact, and several explore the different fields of expertise cultivated by Greeks and Romans, and their culturally varied interpretations of what constitutes authority. Reviel Netz comments on the “exotic... Greek-ness” of mathematically-styled treatises and highly marked mathematics-like passages inset into very different types of parent texts (386). Alice König observes Frontinus’s contributions to a Roman tradition of “supplanting Greek models with new Roman equivalents” (159), yielding a “destabilizing” mosaic of anecdotal exempla drawn from many different regions (168). Aude Doody traces the Varro’s sourcing of agricultural information not only from Romans but from Greeks and even the Carthaginian Mago, whose massive agricultural work was dissolved into bite-size pieces that could serve as a ready reference for literate slaves (189).

The possibility that slaves might possess expertise surpassing their masters' in certain areas invokes the broader set of uneasy negotiations between disciplinary expertise and political power. These negotiations acquired a particular urgency in the cases of philosophy, law, and military science. Michael Trapp sketches in broad strokes philosophers' gradual self-definition against orators, politicians, physicians, and others, while Harry Hine traces in more detail how Seneca presents himself not so much as a philosopher as "a model of how to bring philosophy into the warp and weft of Roman life" (81).

Expertise in a theoretical discipline is of course quite a different animal from expertise in practical work. Indeed, Marco Formisano argues that the balance between theory and practice formed "the conceptual core of the ancient discourse of war" (131), situating military history between the study of past instantiations of conflict and persistently applicable theory (152). Alice König delicately sifts Frontinus's appeals to explicit theoretical knowledge and tacit practical wisdom, situating his work within the larger context of an ongoing Roman dialogue about "*sollertia* and *scientia*" (167).

The distinction between theoretical and practical expertise provokes questions about the differences between how books and people function as vehicles of authority. Johannes Wietzke offers some welcome remarks on the realities of authorship and "publication" in the ancient world in considering whether Ptolemy's *Syntaxis* might be viewed as an act of "literary euergetism" (348). Jill Harries explores how book collections played into legal scholars' self-representations as experts whose mastery of even the most recherché details of legal knowledge made them essential to the everyday business of running the empire.

The mechanics of textual authority manifest most clearly when the reader is invoked as a participant in the process of knowledge exchange. Nicolas Wiater offers a forceful reminder that an author's self-presentation as an expert must be situated with respect to his "rapport" with the reader (233), as when Dionysius of Halicarnassus makes the reader witness to his process of reaching conclusions. Ralph Rosen explores another possible outcome for such a process: occasionally Galen's readers are allowed to see him fail to reach a conclusion, as when he admits to *aporia* about the mechanism by which the fetus is first animated. At that point he transitions from physiological to philosophical discourse, which Rosen suggests may paradoxically add to Galen's authority (288). Daryn Lehoux studies another possible link between author and reader in Galen's deployment of his

addressees as background characters. Lehoux presents this as a special case of using named eyewitnesses to add “epistemic power” to his case studies, making addressees potential instruments of textual authority.

This volume does a great service not only in engaging a broad and nuanced array of types of expertise and ways of deploying them, but also in bringing together contributions from disciplines that are all too often confined to separate silos, allowing the common threads between them to interweave. It should be said that this is very much a book on textual forms of expertise. While there are some references to material culture, they are ancillary to arguments about texts (rarely “books”) and their authors. The surviving ancient discourse on craft expertise and other forms of tacit knowledge (limited as it is) does not make much of an appearance either; Galen and Ptolemy, for example, are presented as master manipulators of words rather than bodies or instruments. But rather than a shortcoming of the volume (which bills itself, fairly, as being about *scientific* culture rather than *technical* cultures more broadly), this should be viewed as an incentive to future work using the remarkable array of theoretical tools and methods its contributors have provided.

COURTNEY ROBY

Cornell University, [croby@cornell.edu](mailto:croby@cornell.edu)